DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 392 099 CS 509 193

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TITLE The Intercultural Informant: An Experiential Learning Resource for Teacher Training.
PUB DATE Nov 95
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (81st, San Antonio, TX, November 18-21, 1995).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Environment; *Educational Games; Ethnicity; *Ethnocentrism; Higher Education; *Intercultural Communication; Preservice Teacher Education; Race; *Simulation
IDENTIFIERS *Diversity (Student)

ABSTRACT

With an increase in diverse cultures comes a responsibility for educators to become aware of their ethnocentric attitudes that influence increasingly diverse classrooms. One place to unpack attitudes about diversity in the classroom is to encourage teachers in training to become aware of their own ethnocentrism. One way for teachers to become aware of their own cultural attitudes is for them to participate in a game/simulation such as "Intercultural Informant." For this game, the class is divided into three groups; then three people, one from each group, are called forward to create, on their own, a culture, or, alternatively, to choose an existing culture they are familiar with. They then return to their group, which is given 3 minutes to interview them about the culture they have chosen to represent. Following the interview session, the game begins with questions posed by the facilitator such as the following: (1) How does the culture perceive time? (2) How does gender impact the culture? (3) Does the culture embody a religion? During each round, members of the group are given a chance to discuss the question before answering. Once they have offered an answer, the cultural informant decides, based on the degree of its accuracy, whether they should receive points or have points taken away. Instructors can use this game to test the impact of a holistic experiential learning game on their teachers in training. (Contains eight references.) (TB)

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THE INTERCULTURAL INFORMANT: AN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING RESOURCE FOR TEACHER TRAINING

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November 1995

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CS509193

Poster session presented at the Speech Communication Association convention in San Antonio, Texas

THE INTERCULTURAL INFORMANT: AN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING RESOURCE FOR TEACHER TRAINING

Goal: To use gaming/simulation to unpack instructor ethnocentricism

INTRODUCTION

As teacher training programs reflect on the demographics of the student population of the 1990s, Martin (1994) asserts that immigration to the United States is increasing drastically. With an increase in diverse cultures comes a responsibility for educators to become aware of their ethnocentric attitudes that influence our increasingly diverse classrooms. One place to unpack our attitudes about diversity in the classroom is to encourage teachers in training to become aware of their own ethnocentricism.

According to Gudykunst and Kim (1992), "ethnocentricism refers to our tendency to identify with our ingroup (e.g., ethnic or racial group, culture) and to evaluate outgroups and their members according to its standards" (also refer to Sumner 1940, p. 14). Gudykunst and Kim warn that the major conscious/unconscious consequence of ethnocentricism is the view that the "ingroups' values and ways of doing things are seen as superior to the outgroups' values and ways of doing things" (p. 95). Ethnocentricism in the classroom is one of the factors that Banks (1991) addresses.

Banks states that in order to become "effective

instructors" in today's multicultural classrooms, teaching assistants (TAs) need to examine their own racial and ethnic attitudes, to be aware of and sensitive to the ethnic and cultural characteristics of their students, and to help themselves and their students to develop higher levels of cross-cultural competency and functioning" (p. 67). As a way of achieving Banks's objective pertaining to racial and ethnic attitudes, Mary Hinchcliff-Pelias and I have devised a gaming/simulation that we label "The Intercultural Informant." What follows is an abbreviated overview of the game/simulation. Following an abbreviated overview of the process, this paper concludes with a paraphrased summation of anecdotal evidence collected from TAs who have engaged The Intercultural Informant.

GAMING/SIMULATION PROCEDURES

The objective of The Intercultural Informant is to use "gaming/simulation" (Duke, 1974, p. 205) as a tool for making salient a variety of each player's ethnocentric attitudes. Prior to facilitating The Intercultural Informant, the game facilitator should have three people create three separate cultures. The cultures that are selected can be a hypothetical culture or an existing culture. The person who creates a hypothetical culture or selects an existing culture is labeled a "cultural informant."

The class is divided into three groups. One cultural informant for the duration of the game is assigned to his/her group. The game participants are told that an expert from a

particular culture is in the group. Each group has three minutes to communicate with that group's cultural informant. Following the three minute question/answer interview session, the game facilitator will ask a content related culturally based question. Some examples of a content based question are as follows: (1) How does the culture perceive time; (2) How does gender impact the culture; (3) Does the culture embody a religion; (4) Is color important in the culture; (5) Are words valued in the culture; (6) Is group membership encouraged; (7) Does the culture value education; etc.? The three minute interview session plus the time needed for all three groups to answer a facilitator's content based question constitute a round of play.

During a round each group is given time to discuss its response to the content question and a group representative shares one answer for the entire group. Once the group spokesperson has shared the group's decision, the cultural expert shares his or her perception of the group's response and if warranted awards points to or subtracts points from the group score. The number of points awarded or subtracted, a maximum of five per question, is determined by the cultural expert. Each cultural expert bases his or her decision to award or to subtract points on the quality of the group's response. The game is terminated once a group accrues 45 points.

The number of rounds necessary for accruing 45 points varies between games. The game facilitator should be prepared to engage the groups in 20 or more rounds. If there is a tie, a tie

breaker round is played. At the end of the play, the game facilitator should lead the game participants in a debriefing session (refer to Petranek, Corey, & Black, 1992; Steinwacks, 1992; Stewart, 1992).

SUMMATION OF ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE

Mary Hinchcliff-Pelias and I during a Fall Semester 1994 Southern Illinois University-Carbondale TA training workshop used our version of The Cultural Informant. Many of the comments we received echoed the gaming participant attitudes shared by Greenblat and Duke (1975). The TAs participating in our workshop viewed The Intercultural Informant as a worthwhile activity. The game was perceived as a novel way to learn about various cultural influences. Moreover, the game gave the TAs the opportunity to make salient and to reflect upon some "taken for granted" aspects of culture that influence/perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices.

CONCLUSION

As teacher training programs reflect on the demographics of our student population, one construct that teachers should ponder is ethnocentricism. One way of becoming familiar with ethnocentricism is to admit that it exists. One way of getting people to admit that ethnocentricism exists is to increase people's awareness of their ethnocentric cognitive, affective, and behavioral patterns. Toward this aim, Mary Hinchcliff-Pelias and I recommend that educators test the impact of a holistic experiential learning gaming/simulation resource that we label

"The Intercultural Informant."

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